

August 2010

Santa Rosa County District 3 Newsletter

A Message From Your Commissioner



District 3
Commissioner
W.D. "Don" Salter

Contact
6495 Caroline Street
Suite M
Milton, FL 32570

Phone:
(850) 983-1877 WK
(850) 994-6426 HM

E-mail:
comm-salter@
santarosa.fl.gov

Fax:
(850) 983-1856



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Santa Rosa County continues to be a great place to call home, even with all the challenges we have experienced during 2010. Life is truly interesting as you never know what each day has in store for us. Whoever thought that most of this year would be spent responding to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill? The good news is "it's been capped," and hopefully will stay capped. Now the environmental and economic recovery will start. We must ensure that our waterways are restored and our economy is rebuilt for long term success. I want to thank everyone for all their hard work and dedication during these trying times.

As you may know, the BOCC and staff have had several budget workshops for the upcoming 2010-2011 fiscal year. We will, unfortunately, continue to see a decline in our revenues with the ongoing downturn in the economy and the reduction in property values. We anticipate a \$2.2 million reduction again for the upcoming year. This amount could have been a lot more if it had not been for the 1.4 percent increase in new construction (new homes and businesses). New construction adds to our county tax base which helps offset other losses of revenue. This reinforces the ongoing need for an aggressive economic development program which will create new jobs and bring new people to our county. These new residents will buy new homes and shop at local businesses, which will help our county revenue. So, we all need to work hard to do our part in creating new jobs!

We also need to understand that all of us can make a positive difference in our county by being more creative and continue to look for efficiencies within our jobs and departments. One of my favorite beliefs is that all of us need to be better "change makers and risk takers." Things will never get better if we aren't willing to change and take the risks needed to make those changes. So I encourage all of us to become "change makers and risk takers." If we all do our part, we will continue to have a great place to call home. I appreciate all the hard work of our employees and will continue to do my part to support you and the success of **Our County!**

Sincerely,
Don Salter
District 3 Commissioner

What do we Have that Others Don't

Santa Rosa County is blessed with economic assets that are unique to Northwest Florida. Our beach is the shining gem of this beautiful place we call home and our farm economy, which plays into our rich tourism base, makes Santa Rosa County the crown jewel of Northwest Florida. While Santa Rosa County is a wonderful place to visit, it's also an ideal place to bring industry. Our workforce in Santa Rosa County is second to none, and we offer assets like no other neighboring county in the region: our product. Santa Rosa has an industrial property what other areas in our region covet. We have property that suits the needs of any and all of our targeted industries.

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Protecting Military Communities in Santa Rosa County Today and Years to Come

Santa Rosa County has been proactive in partnering with our military communities to develop strategies that protect the installations from encroachment, incompatible development and other activities that might hamper the successful completion of the military mission. We have actively participated in Joint Land Use Studies with the US Navy and the US Air Force and have implemented rules and regulations that protect both the local citizens of Santa Rosa County and fulfill the requirements necessary to sustain military operational requirements.

Through collaborative partnering with NAS Whiting Field, the Florida Defense Alliance, Florida Forever, the Nature Conservancy, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Forestry we have successfully protected over 15,000 acres of land adjacent to our military installations through direct acquisition or easements. Funding for these purchases was provided through Department of Defense grants, primarily the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative or REPI Program which provides the framework for allocating funds to implement buffering projects. Most of the land acquisitions around NAS Whiting Field and Eglin AFB were made by our partners; the county was able to the remainder purchase using REPI funds and other grants that reimburse the county for these purchases. The funds that are returned to the county are placed in a revolving fund that is used for acquisition of additional lands.

Why are we doing this? NAS Whiting Field is the largest employer in Santa Rosa County hosting approximately 15,000 jobs, defense spending of \$386.1 million, and a direct county economic impact of \$856.8 million annually. Members of the NAS Whiting Field community also actively participate in the local community. Personnel are actively involved in Habitat for Humanity, Learn to Read of Northwest Florida, Council on Aging/Meals on Wheels, Special Olympics, local youth associations, as well as many other valuable community programs.

Land acquisitions around NAS Whiting Field, Eglin AFB and the Outlying Navy Fields not only protect the base from encroachment, they protect environmentally sensitive lands including the Yellow River Ravine, Blackwater State Forest and Clear Creek; they prevent development in the high hazard areas off the ends of the runways, protect critical night vision training areas from lighting hazards, and they provide future recreational opportunities for all of the citizens in Santa Rosa County. Future plans include a trail around



NAS Whiting Field and an off road recreation area or ATV Park. Additional lands have been acquired and will be used specifically for industrial activities. A landmark agreement with the U.S. Navy will provide runway and aircraft access to this facility allowing recruitment of high tech aviation and defense related businesses. This will create jobs and increase the economy for the county.

Military buffering activities within Santa Rosa County have been successful. As early as 1999, officials from NAS Whiting Field, Santa Rosa County and other government agencies started discussing buffering and encroachment. Through a collaborative approach, we have been extremely successful in achieving these goals. A plan was created and Santa Rosa County has obtained \$3.14 million in support of land acquisitions. Two Joint Land Use Studies have been completed and aircraft noise complaints are down. Our achievements have garnered awards from the American Planning Association and staff has spoken at several national conferences highlighting successful encroachment partnering efforts. NAS Whiting Field is expanding and has successfully transitioned its primary training aircraft from the T-34 to the T-6 and the US Army 7th Special Forces Group will arrive soon and share this airspace with no anticipated negative community impacts.

From 2003 to present, significant progress has been made in acquiring lands to protect the military missions that occur within Santa Rosa County. Efforts will continue; however funding is limited. We will continue to submit grant funding requests, and will remain a supportive partner with NAS Whiting Field and Eglin AFB in their efforts to implement their buffering programs and seek out opportunities that both support military missions and the citizens of Santa Rosa County.



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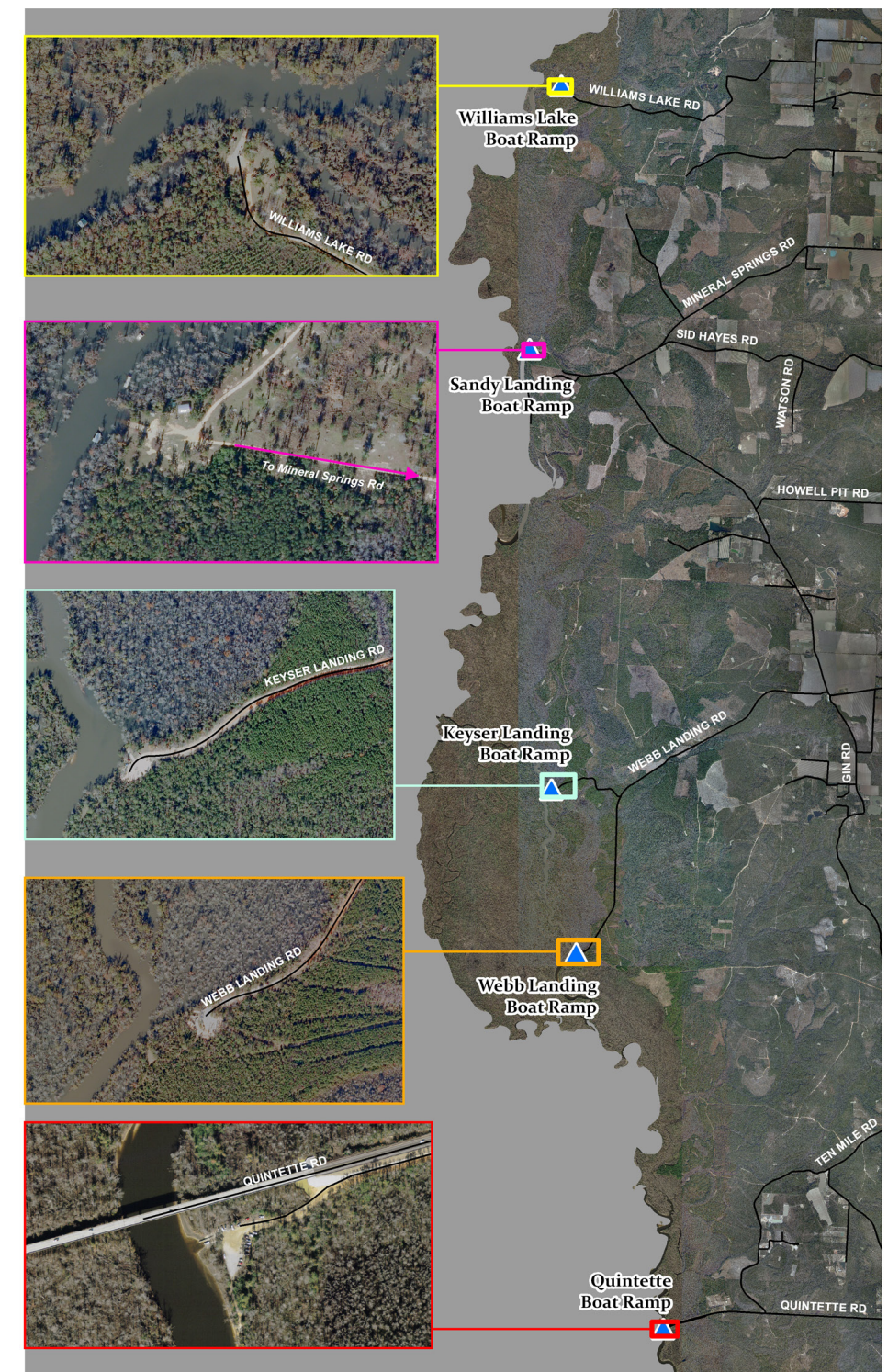
District 3 Boat Ramps -Challenges & Opportunities-

Santa Rosa County is pleased to provide several boat ramps in District 3, all on Escambia River, for our citizens to enjoy. Keyser Landing, Webb Landing, Quintette Boat Ramp, Williams Lake Boat Ramp and Sandy Landing Boat Ramp are several ramps that receive significant usage.

Several boat ramps have amenities such as primitive camping sites, barbecue grills and portable restrooms. The Santa Rosa County website (www.santarosa.fl.gov) offers a wealth of information about all county boat ramps including locations and amenities provided. Just visit the website and click on "Parks and Recreation" on the left side of the home page under Services. Citizens can also call the parks department for information at (850) 983-1940.

One challenge the county has faced is the continued sale of private timberlands which could restrict or deny access to some of the boat ramps. In August of 2006, the county purchased 33 acres from International Paper Company in order to provide road access to Webb and Keyser Landings. These landings are owned by Water Management and maintained by Santa Rosa County. Public access to these landings could have been lost if the county had failed to acquire the property.

Another potential challenge exists at the Sandy Landing Boat Ramp. The county does not own the property, but has a license agreement with the owner, RMS Timberlands, LLC, that allows public access with the county maintaining the ramp, with certain provisions. One provision required by RMS Timberlands is for the ramp to be closed from January 1 through February 15 of each year. Another provision states "The license shall terminate upon the conveyance of the property to a third party." Such provisions cause concern that we may lose the facility. Also, making major improvements to a boat ramp on property that might be sold to a



private party is not good usage of tax payer funds. Flooding over the past year has created an additional challenge. Severe bank erosion caused by the river being at flood stage multiple times has left the ramp in a more unprotected state and subject to more erosion in future flooding events.

Therefore, the county is currently investigating the potential of acquiring

property for a new boat ramp in the Sandy Landing area. The process involves negotiating with property owners and having environmental and archeological studies performed on potential sites to determine feasibility. Such a process takes time, but we are committed to meeting the recreational boating needs our citizens expect and deserve.



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Public Transportation Needs Assessment for Rural Area of County

In response to a request from the Rural Health Network, county staff is working on a needs assessment for public transportation in the rural areas of the county. The Rural Health Network, which meets on a regular basis in Jay, identified transportation as one of its top priorities. The county applies for and receives funding from the Federal Transit Administration for public transportation in the rural areas.

Currently, the funding is used to provide the door-to-door on-demand community transportation service, which requires a 50 percent match. This type of service is expensive, and the trips are limited. Other types of service, such as shuttles, can be explored. The needs assessment will be the first step followed by development of an operational concept, cost estimate, and possible revenue sources to fund the transportation service. The Jay Town Council and Board of County Commissioners have approved a workshop to gather public input for the needs assessment. The date will be announced soon. For further information, contact County Transportation Planner Nancy Model at 981-7080 or nancym@santarosa.fl.gov.

Connect Vet Update

The Santa Rosa County Connect Vet transportation service was a huge success, with over 80 veterans enrolled. This much needed transportation service provided transportation for eligible veterans from their homes to the VA clinic in Pensacola, and return home. Initial service began in December 2008 and continued until May 2010, when funding was exhausted the service was suspended.

This much needed program has been suspended while the committee reorganizes, seeks additional and sustained funding via sponsorships, donations, grants and fund raisers among other sources. Connect Vet is currently undergoing an overhaul to ensure this vital program will be available far into the future, as long as Santa Rosa County veterans require transportation to their VA appointments.

Current enrollees will be notified when Connect Vet resumes and information will be available on how to ensure that this necessary program continues.

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When we talk about economic development, what we really mean is jobs. We want good quality, good paying jobs for Santa Rosans. We have a stellar workforce ready and able to work for the industries that Santa Rosa is poised to attract. This workforce needs sustainable long term employment and a strong industrial base can provide those jobs, but there has to be a place to put them. In Santa Rosa County, we're fortunate. We have industrial property right off of Interstate 10 to suit logistics and transportation companies, land for aerospace and defense companies with access to Whiting Field's runway. We even have a spot for companies needing rail access.

Regionally, we are surrounded by a strong delegation of economic development agencies and professionals. We all work together to build our regional economy. A complement to this is the new leadership at the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce. We are encouraged that our efforts to bring new companies to our two-county area will become even stronger. The Pensacola News Journal recently published an article that cited the new Pensacola Chamber CEO's desire to work with TEAM Santa Rosa to help bring companies to our region, particularly to some of the industrial properties that Santa Rosa has established which can suit a variety of industrial needs. This is just another example of how our assets are working to create a brighter economic outlook each day.

We in Santa Rosa County are working to ensure a robust industrial foundation that drives the economic prosperity that we all desire. Without this foundation, industry has no interest in bringing their jobs to our area. There are two critical questions on the minds of companies and consultants scouting the country for business to locate. Those two questions are, do you have a workforce that is skilled in our field of expertise, and do you have a sound location for us to put our operation? If Santa Rosa County can answer yes to BOTH of these questions, we then become a player in a rigorous competition of "may-the-best-location-win."

In Santa Rosa County, we are strong. We're strong in assets, strong in the resources needed to clench the deal. Our County Commission is open to industry and supports economic development. We have incentives in place that help entice businesses to move here, locate here and expand here. Our property is second to none and our neighboring counties simply cannot compete with the arsenal of product that we've built here in Santa Rosa County.

Industrial property is a precious commodity that sadly, is not renewable. There is only a finite quantity for us to harvest. Today, we have property that is yet to be developed. That property represents the jobs that our children will have, and the jobs our grandchildren will have. We all want future generations to thrive in Santa Rosa County. We want to retain the outstanding talent that our school system, colleges and universities and our local military work so hard to cultivate. We want our talent to grow the futures of their children and grandchildren. Right now, we have the basis we need to get us there and every day, your commission is working hard to ensure that basis and help it grow. Yes, Santa Rosa County is the treasure of northwest Florida, our riches are invested in a secure annuity, which will pay dividends many times over, in the form of wealth for generations to come.